Quebec Declared a Nation Within a United Canada

To the Teacher

Recently the Canadian Parliament passed a resolution recognizing Quebec as a nation within Canada. Opinions differ as to the meaning and importance of this action. One Cabinet minister resigned, calling it an act of “ethnic nationalism.” Others see it as a precaution against more far-reaching Quebecois independence efforts. All over the world, countries are grappling with issues of separatism and ethnic nationalism—think of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom, the Kurds in Iraq, Chechyns in Russia, Tibetans in China, and so forth. Is the nation-within-a-nation approach likely to satisfy separatists, or further inflame conflict? Take advantage of this “teachable moment” by asking your middle or high school students to explore the historical, cultural, and civic issues related to this current event.

National Council for Social Studies
Standards Addressed

Culture
Explain and give examples of how language, literature, the arts, architecture and other artifacts, traditions, beliefs, values, and behaviors contribute to the development and transmission of culture.

Time, Continuity, and Change
Identify and use key concepts such as chronology, causality, change, conflict, and complexity to explain, analyze, and show connections among patterns of historical change and continuity.

Individual Development and Identity
Describe the ways family, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and institutional affiliations contribute to personal identity.

Power, Authority, and Governance
Describe the ways nations and organizations respond to forces of unity and diversity affecting order and security. Explain conditions, actions, and motivations that contribute to conflict and cooperation within and among nations.

Civic Ideals and Practice
Identify and explain the roles of formal and informal political actors in influencing and shaping public policy.

Suggestions for Using the Worksheets

• Discuss and complete the first set of questions about Quebec as a class.

• For Quebec investigation, assign individual questions to small groups, and have each group report their findings/thoughts to their classmates.

• Ask individuals, pairs, or small groups to research and respond to the questions for another separatist movement—either selected from the list provided, or identified by the students with teacher approval.

• Include an oral presentation as part of the assignment.

• Ask students to take a position—supporting or opposing one or all of the instances of separatism and justifying their opinions.

• Discuss and complete the last set of questions, comparing and contrasting all the examples as a class.
Related Web Sites
CTV—PM says Quebecois form nation within Canada

CBC News—House passes motion recognizing Quebecois as nation

BBC News—PM says Quebec “nation in Canada”
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6174986.stm

The Vancouver Sun—Harper government loses minister over Quebec “nation” resolution
http://www.canada.com/vancouversun/news/story.html?id=9726530a-3a94-4f9b-9c7c-3eefda47ab6b&k=73218

Links to Information on Separatist Movements
Separatist, Independence, and Decentralization Movements
http://www.constitution.org/cs_separ.htm

Movements for National Liberation and Regional Autonomy
http://www.broadleft.org/natliber.htm

List of Active Autonomist and Secessionist Movements
Worksheet 1: Quebec

Recently, the Canadian Parliament passed a resolution recognizing Quebec as a nation within Canada. Opinions differ as to the meaning and importance of this action. One Cabinet minister resigned, calling it an act of “ethnic nationalism.” Others see it as a precaution against more far-reaching Quebecois independence efforts. All over the world, countries are grappling with issues of separatism and ethnic nationalism—think of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom, the Kurds in Iraq, Chechyns in Russia, Tibetans in China, and so forth. Is the nation-within-a-nation approach likely to satisfy separatists or further inflame conflict?

Answer the following questions about the Quebec separatists.

1. What contributes to the Quebecois “identity”? What makes them see themselves as separate from Canada? What role does language play? What role does culture play?

2. What are the benefits of the “nation-within-a-nation” resolution? What might the Quebecois appreciate about the Parliament’s recognition of them as a nation?

3. What are the drawbacks of the “nation-within-a-nation” resolution? Why are some people so opposed to it (e.g., the Cabinet minister who resigned)?

4. What are the shortcomings of the “nation-within-a-nation” resolution? What more might the Quebec separatists want? Why?
Worksheet 2: Another Example of Separatism

Select one of the following examples of a separatist movement, or select one of your own (with approval from your teacher), and complete the questions below.

Flemish Region/Belgium  Sardinia/Italy  Chechnya/Russia
Basque Country/Spain  Tibet/China  Punjab/India
Aceh/Indonesia  Somali Region/Ethiopia  Zapatistas/Mexico
Other __________________________

1. What characteristics contribute to the separatist group’s identity? Explain the role of language and culture in their identity.

2. Briefly describe the history of the separatist movement. What led to the conflict?

3. In your opinion, would a “nation-within-a-nation” resolution satisfy the separatist group that you are investigating? Explain why or why not.

(continued)
4. What do you think the advantages of “separating” would be?

5. What do you think the disadvantages of “separating” would be?

6. How is this example similar to the situation in Quebec? How is it different?

7. How do you think the conflict in your example of separatism could or should be resolved? Explain your thinking.
Separatism—What’s It All About?

Worksheet 3: Comparing and Contrasting
After completing the questions about Quebec and hearing from one another about other examples of separatist movements, answer the following questions. Provide explanations and examples in your answers.

1. What do the separatist groups have in common? In what ways are they similar?

2. What are the differences among the separatist groups?

3. What strategies do separatist groups use to further their causes?


5. How does a separatist movement differ from an independence movement?

6. Who or what does separation benefit?

7. Who or what does maintaining national unity benefit?
Worksheet 1: Quebec
1. Quebecois identity is rooted in French language and culture, while the majority of Canada shares English language and culture.

2. The resolution acknowledges Quebec’s unique identity and might be used as leverage in future attempts at accommodations for that identity (e.g., French language schools).

3. The resolution may be seen as reinforcing divisions rather than commonalities.

4. The resolution may carry no substantive advantages for Quebec, and might be an empty gesture. Quebec may want to continue to press for self-governance and independence.

Worksheet 2: Another Example of Separatism
Answers will vary depending on the example selected.

Worksheet 3: Comparing and Contrasting
1. Separatist movements are rooted in identity based on one or more of the following: region, ethnicity, language, culture, and/or religion.

2. Groups differ based on their particular identities, historical circumstances, and tactics/strategies.

3. Strategies range from politics to violence.

4. Answers will vary.

5. Separatists seek independence as a separate population. Independence seekers are trying to break away from a controlling power (e.g., colonial power).

6. Answers will vary.

7. Answers will vary.